

FROM THE EDITORS OF

COMPUTERWORLD

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Intranets

A MONTHLY LOOK AT WEB DEVELOPMENTS BEHIND THE FIREWALL

WEBCASTING

Now Showing On the Company Channel

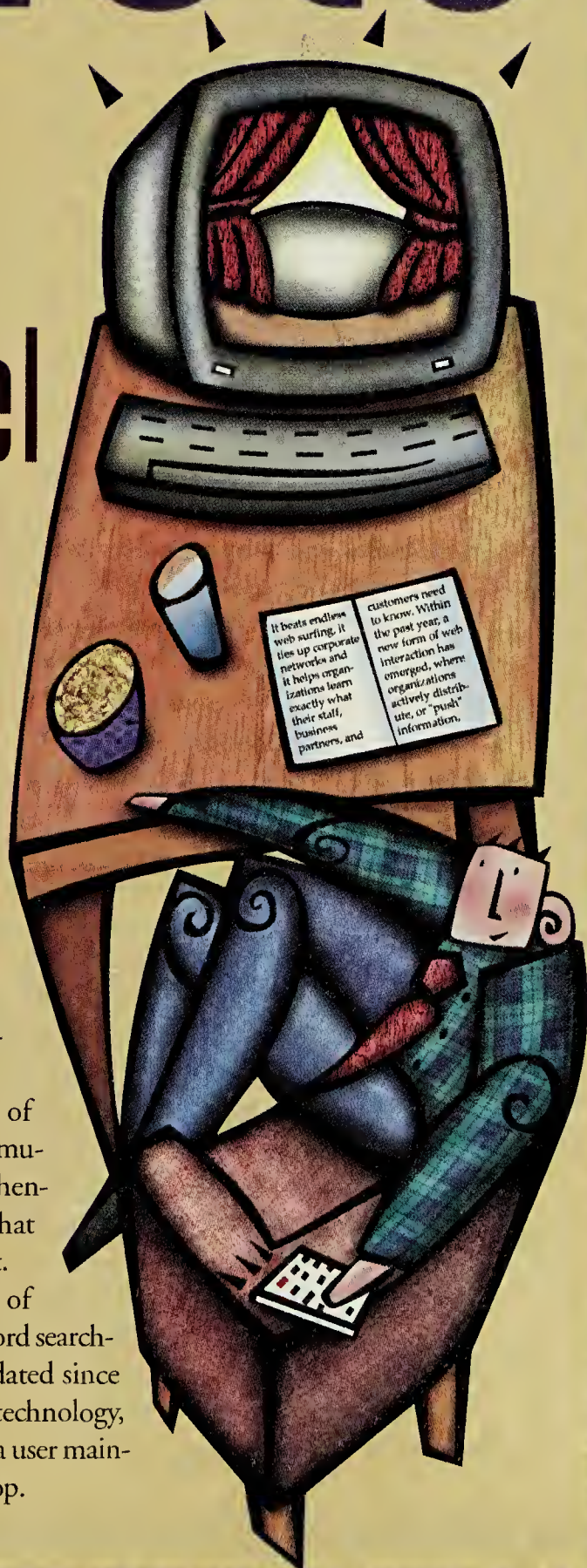
KEEPING STAFF AND BUSINESS PARTNERS UP TO DATE IS THE NEXT USE OF 'PUSH' TECHNOLOGY. THOUGH NOT QUITE READY FOR PRIME TIME, IT MAY JUST CHANGE THE WAY YOU MANAGE INFORMATION. BY TONY BAER

The Chicago Board of Trade was hot to reduce the crush of memos that typically go out to its 4,000 members. It was already using its Web site to publicly distribute commodity prices. So the idea of using the Web to improve routine communications was intuitive — if the trading organization could organize memos so members didn't have to search for the right one, says Bill Stewart, co-chairman of CBOT's Internet advisory committee.

Enter a new system that combines the automatic notification capability of electronic mail with the efficiency of broadcasting. The tool, Wayfarer Communications, Inc.'s Incisa, would automatically pop up a headline or alert icon whenever a new memo came through. CBOT is now conducting a pilot with that technology, though it hasn't yet decided whether or when to go beyond that.

Incisa is part of a growing band of tools that seek to leverage the blessings of the Web — good information, fast — and shield users from its curses — keyword searches that turn up 15,000 citations or visits to Web sites that haven't been updated since your last visit. It comes in various forms with various names — e.g., "push" technology, by which organizations distribute data to users' desktops; and channels, where a user maintains a stateless connection to a Web server and data streams onto his desktop.

It's coming to an intranet near you.



WEBCASTING

Continued from page 1

Though the products have just barely hit the market, companies are finding that server-centric versions of webcasters that allow firms to establish one connection over the Web and push the data around internally via the intranet, such as PointCast, Inc.'s new I-Server, conserve bandwidth and limit activity outside the firewall. The intranet offerings also establish a new and timely way to distribute internal information, from executive pronouncements to benefits changes and the latest sales numbers.

Of course, it's early yet, and there are more users conducting pilots than rolling out full implementations. Yet scalability and its associated costs are quickly emerging as a concern. Though Web server add-ons for intranet webcasting might average under \$100 per user, hidden costs to network performance could force organizations into an unending spiral of costly network upgrades. At the Alameda Newspaper Group, for instance, the introduction of webcasting helped force a LAN upgrade to 100Base-T.

A lack of standards also muddies the adoption waters, as may the emerging sentiment that the big guns will one day incorporate the core technology into their products, turning today's technology vendors into providers solely of content (see story at right).

Finally, beyond the technical issues is the weight of adding yet another medium that, like a corporate Web site or intranet home page, needs to be managed, monitored and refreshed so employees pay attention to it. Without a publishing strategy, webcasting could become just another information source employees are too busy to consult, no matter how visibly it pops up on their computer screen.

Yet a host of companies are undaunted and are placing their webcasting bets.

American Management Systems, Inc., a global information technology consulting firm, believes webcasting can improve the firm's competitive edge. It's about to inaugurate a "Domi-

no channel" throughout its 7,000-person organization using PointCast's I-Server, a server version of the popular PointCast news and information channel that allows organizations to both cache PointCast channels locally and produce their own channels for intranet distribution.

At American Management Systems, I-Server will supplement a Lotus Development Corp. Notes discussion database of best practices. Consultants will automatically be informed of innovations in their areas of interest. Employees have already used PointCast individually, so the company is optimistic about using the medium for internal use, says Janet McCabe, a vice president at the company. "We regard it as a very effective bulletin board, one that already has people's attention," she says.

AT&T Wireless uses a different product — Intermind Corp.'s Communicator — to broadcast three internal channels covering company

announcements and new technical bulletin alerts. Those alerts go to product developers, both inside and outside the organization, via an external connection to the intranet. Webcasting, says Stacia Johnson, manager of the developer program, is all about efficiency. "It's a lot more efficient because you notify people as changes occur, not when they accumulate at the end of the month," she says.

The University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School is another user that's up and running. Its 5,000 students are the audience for its internally developed Java-based webcasting system, called Spike, which has channels that beam homework assignments and allow students to bid for courses, conduct library searches and find alumni, among other functions.

Created with Javascript, a manual and a text editor and scheduled to integrate PointCast in its next version, Spike supplements unconnected systems that, for

Calling for Consistency

While the Web was built on standards, webcasting (so far) hasn't been. That could ultimately pose conflicts for users if or when the many-vendored field consolidates or cedes major ground to Microsoft and Netscape Communications Corp.

Standards for webcasting would involve messaging and display technologies and how information is organized or indexed. While TCP/IP appears to be the de facto messaging protocol for all things Internet, for example, at least one company has developed an adaptation of TCP/IP for broadcasting, though it's far from universally used.

Tibco, a Reuters subsidiary, developed a protocol in the late 1980s for transmitting Wall Street stock quotes to securities firms. That technology, called The Information Bus (TIB), uses a patented,

intelligent publish and subscribe method and subject-based addressing. In contrast to webcasters such as PointCast, Inc.'s PointCast, which sends out information whether people are tuning in to it or not, TIB doesn't publish anything if there are no subscribers.

TIB is now being submitted to Internet standards bodies. Vendors are beginning to support it: Cisco's router software, for example, will be able to translate Tibco's subject-based addressing data into smart routing. Oracle Corp., Informix Corp. and webcasters Intermind and Quintus are also adding TIB support.

Where displays are concerned, many of the major companies use their own display formats rather than common Web browsers. There are also no standards for prioritizing messages or specifying how often they are refreshed.

instance, required students to go to the library to look up books. Before, "we had a very rich technological environment, but it was based on the user going to wherever the system was," notes Gerry McCartney, Wharton chief information officer. Next year, the school's 65,000 alumni will gain lifetime access to Spike.

And in a setup that may portend intranet distribution of software updates, antiviral product maker McAfee, Inc. recently began using a BackWeb Technologies server to "push" updates of ViruScan to corporate intranet servers and consumers alike. (Once it gets to the server, ViruScan is distributed using McAfee's SaberLAN tool for automated software distribution.) Marimba, Inc.'s Castanet, which broadcasts Java applets, has also been designed for creating software update channels.

In any case, using webcasting for external vs. internal information isn't an either/or decision. Many organizations are discovering synergies between exter-

nal content and company data.

At Houston Industries, a regional Texas utility, 10 I-Server channels supplement PointCast Network offerings so 5,000+ staffers can view The Weather Channel as well as the impact of climate conditions on daily power generation operations. "Our folks are especially interested in tracking The Weather Channel's hurricane tracking page," says Bob Bertrand, systems developer.

ON THE DOWNSIDE

Usage, of course, means network traffic, even if the vendors are quick to reassure that their broadcast method keeps the message small.

A typical PointCast news article, for instance, whether beamed from the source or circulated internally via I-Server, is just 2K to 3K bytes; a color weather map is 27K bytes. But multiply that by thousands of users, and what does that do to network traffic and performance lev-

els? Ask companies whose employees embraced the original PointCast.

"As more and more people got the news on their desktops, [network traffic levels] began looking like a cancerous tumor," says Kevin Hamilton, online information manager for the Alameda Newspaper Group.

The Bay Area newspaper chain switched from PointCast to PointCast I-Server, upgraded its LANs to 100 bit/sec. Ethernet and placed the T1 wide-area network linking the six local sites inside the firewall.

More recently, it has replaced PointCast with the MSNBC news reader because the Microsoft Corp. channel requires less client software and fits more closely with the firm's long-term plans to implement Microsoft's Active Desktop, the next-generation Web client that comes with a browser, webcast channels and other plug-ins. (Since then, PointCast has signed an agreement with Microsoft to put its channel on Active Desktop.)

Other webcast content and tool providers have taken measures to soften their network impact:

- Wayfarer's and Intermin's strategy limits transmissions to either brief text messages or single HTML text pages. For the full document, a user can hot-link on the listed URL.
- Tibco, Inc. uses subject-based addressing, which ensures that messages are broadcast only if subscribers so request.
- Lanacom, Inc.'s Headliner Web site monitoring service checks for changes and dispatches brief alerts whenever they occur, rather than broadcasting whole documents.
- InCommon LLC uses caching features that store the Web page previously downloaded and pages hot-linked to it. That reduces traffic and download times.

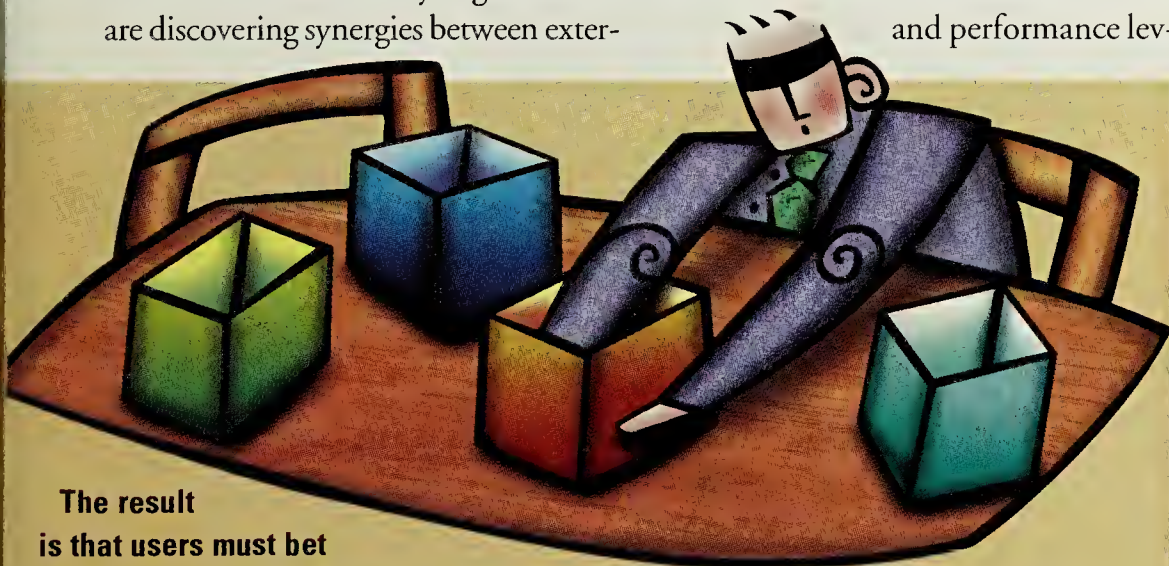
Yet even these advances may not be enough. "Bandwidth is something that you must protect," says Kim Spenchian, vice president of infor-

Continued on next page

WHAT'S ONLINE

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The result is that users must bet on proprietary technology in an immature market. The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania preferred not to take such a gamble and built its own intranet webcast application. "The technology isn't stable enough," Chief Information Officer Gerry McCartney says.

But there are ways to hedge your bets, adds Jeff Weiss, director of engineering for Internet and new media at EDS. "To protect your intranet investment, organize a repository that can be scanned by a standard HTML search engine," he advises.

That would cover you if "push" technology becomes a commodity, as some analysts predict. "There will be near-term opportunities for midsize players who make it part of their value-added product, but ultimately, I expect the major players — Microsoft, Lotus and Netscape — will incorporate this technology as a building block," Meta Group analyst Stan Lepeak says. In fact, Microsoft and Netscape have already announced such intentions for their next-generation Web clients.

— TONY BAER

WEBCASTING

Continued from page 3

information systems at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Inc. "The class [of push technology] that's out there is not yet ready for prime time."

Not all users are concerned, though. "Capacity is not an issue for us," says AT&T Wireless' Johnson, whose service goes out to a few hundred users. "The chances that all of your users will access the same document at the same time is pretty low."

Beyond bandwidth and traffic issues, scaling up a webcasting program to tens of thousands of users across a global enterprise — something few, if any, companies have actually done, raises other management concerns.

Vendors recommend the installation of multiple servers; remote "proxies" that manage transmission to and

from the server, gateway or client; subject-based addressing repositories; or intelligent agents that filter incoming material and determine whether anybody should receive it. Theoretically, distributed servers should work, but experts in the early days of client/server said distributed databases were supposed to work, too, and stories of how they didn't are now legend.

Only one vendor — Tibco — has actually addressed physical networking (see story page 2). The company's recent alliance with Cisco Systems, Inc. would extend Tibco's subject-based addressing capability to smart routers, with the result that messages would be directed only to those portions of the network where valid subscribers are.

Security for intranet webcasting,

meanwhile, becomes an issue of internal system integrity for original content and of encryption, authentication and firewalls, where information is pushed or channels opened from intranets to those who access the system via a private piece of the Internet. Virus protection, of course, is needed for anything that comes in to the corporate system.

In many cases, webcasting vendors rely on the measures that the customer has implemented on its Web servers, E-mail and network operating systems.

"We leverage security, credentials and access control [already present] for each of our supported delivery methods," says Richard Schwartz, president of Diffusion, Inc., developer of Intra-Express, which broadcasts information using a roles-based end-user model

Continued on page 9

Bechtel Re-engineers Engineering

For Bechtel Corp., webcasting is much more business-critical and transparent than news headlines floating around a screen saver.

The San Francisco-based global construction company is starting to use webcasting's underlying technology to keep its engineering and project management documents updated.

Using Tibco's Enterprise Tool Kit as messaging middleware, Bechtel enterprise applications use a publish and subscribe model to communicate updates via an intranet. This capability, being added as new projects begin, is in use among a handful. Suppliers are also starting to link in via external connections to the intranet.

"The idea is to tightly integrate all our work processes," says John

Jahraus, manager of corporate software development. He declined to discuss costs for the strategic project.

Bechtel chose Tibco's The Information Bus (TIB) middleware because when the project began three years ago, TIB was the most reliable game in town. The intranet model proved ideal because of the varied computer experience of Bechtel employees around the world and the firm's many remote locations.

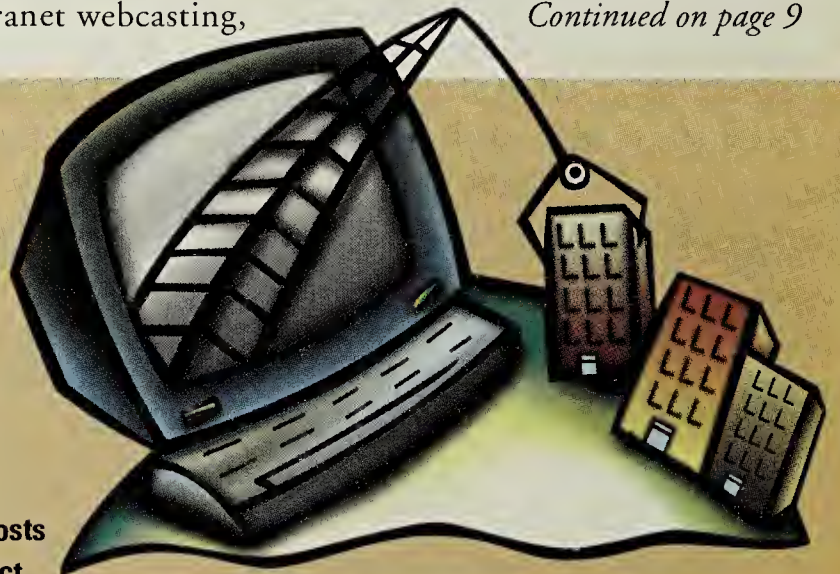
The system is built on a Microsoft Windows NT server, which communicates with the Oracle Corp. database through Open Database Connectivity. It packs an object to be placed on TIB to be published to a subscribing application. The subscriber receives the object, unpacks it and updates the

database at the other end.

"It provides a better use of bandwidth in some cases, especially if there are multiple users for an object that gets published," Jahraus says.

Jahraus learned two lessons from this project. First, as middleware, the project was complex. "You need serious software [and data modeling] engineers to do this kind of work," he says. Second, the goal of process improvement required significant thought on how people used information. "It's a much bigger issue than doing technical analysis of data flows," he adds.

— TONY BAER



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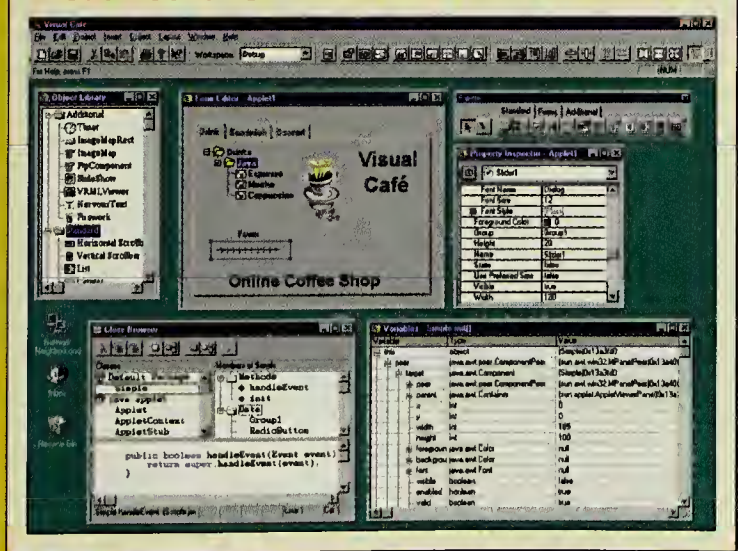
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			PUSH ONLY	PUSH/ PULL		
BackWeb Channel Server <i>BackWeb, San Jose, Calif.</i> CLIENT: Free SERVER: \$10,500 + cost/ subscriber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup ■ End user (with approval) 	CLIENT: Required SERVER: Optional; required for intranets only	yes	yes	yes	CLIENT: Windows 95, NT, 3.1; Macintosh SERVER: Solaris, Windows NT
ChannelManager <i>DataChannel, Bellevue, Wash.</i> CLIENT: \$6,900 (100 seats) SERVER: Bundled w/clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup ■ End user (with IT management approval) 	CLIENT: Web browser helper application SERVER: RDBMS-based ChannelManager (user repository) and Web server helper app.	yes	yes	yes (via search engines)	CLIENT: Java-enabled browser SERVER: Java-enabled Web server
IntraExpress <i>Diffusion, Mountain View, Calif.</i> CLIENT: Bundled w/server SERVER: \$35,000 (five sender clients, 100 recipient clients)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup 	CLIENT: Web browser or Windows client applet SERVER: Optional; required for intranets only	yes	yes	no	CLIENT: Java-enabled browser SERVER: NT Server
Downtown <i>inCommon, San Mateo, Calif.</i> CLIENT: Free SERVER: Base price + cost/subscriber	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup ■ End user (with limited functionality) 	CLIENT: Required SERVER: Required for intranets only	yes	yes	yes	CLIENT: Windows 95, NT; Windows 3.1 by Q2 SERVER: Unix, Windows NT
Communicator <i>Intermind, Seattle</i> CLIENT: Free SERVER: \$5,000/ Web server	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations (password and Intermind- assigned org. code required) ■ Enterprise/Workgroup ■ End user (distribution may be restricted by password) 	CLIENT: Required SERVER: Not a server application. Publishing requires org. code assigned by Intermind.	yes (1-page HTML limit)	yes	no	CLIENT: Windows 95, NT, 3.1 (Macintosh "soon") SERVER: Any Web server
Castanet <i>Marimba, Palo Alto, Calif.</i> CLIENT: Free SERVER: \$1,000-\$25,000 (based on capacity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup ■ End user 	CLIENT: Castanet Tuner SERVER: Castanet Transmitter	yes	yes	yes	CLIENT: Windows 95, NT; Solaris; Macintosh PowerPC SERVER: Solaris; Windows 95, NT
I-Server <i>PointCast, Cupertino, Calif.</i> CLIENT: Free SERVER: \$995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup 	CLIENT: Required SERVER: Optional; required for intranets only	yes	no	no	CLIENT: Windows 95, 3.1; Macintosh PowerPC SERVER: Unix, Windows NT
ImpaQ <i>Quintus, Fremont, Calif.</i> CLIENT: \$250 (enterprise licenses available) SERVER: \$25,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Enterprise/Workgroup 	CLIENT: Web browser SERVER: ImpaQ Publisher	yes	yes	no	CLIENT: Java-enabled browser SERVER: Unix, Windows NT
Incisa <i>Wayfarer, Mountain View, Calif.</i> CLIENT: Free SERVER: \$5,000 (first 100 concurrent users)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ External organizations ■ Enterprise/Workgroup ■ End user 	CLIENT: Required SERVER: Optional; required for intranets only	no	yes	yes	CLIENT: Windows 95, NT, 3.1 (Macintosh and Java "soon") SERVER: Windows NT (Unix "soon")



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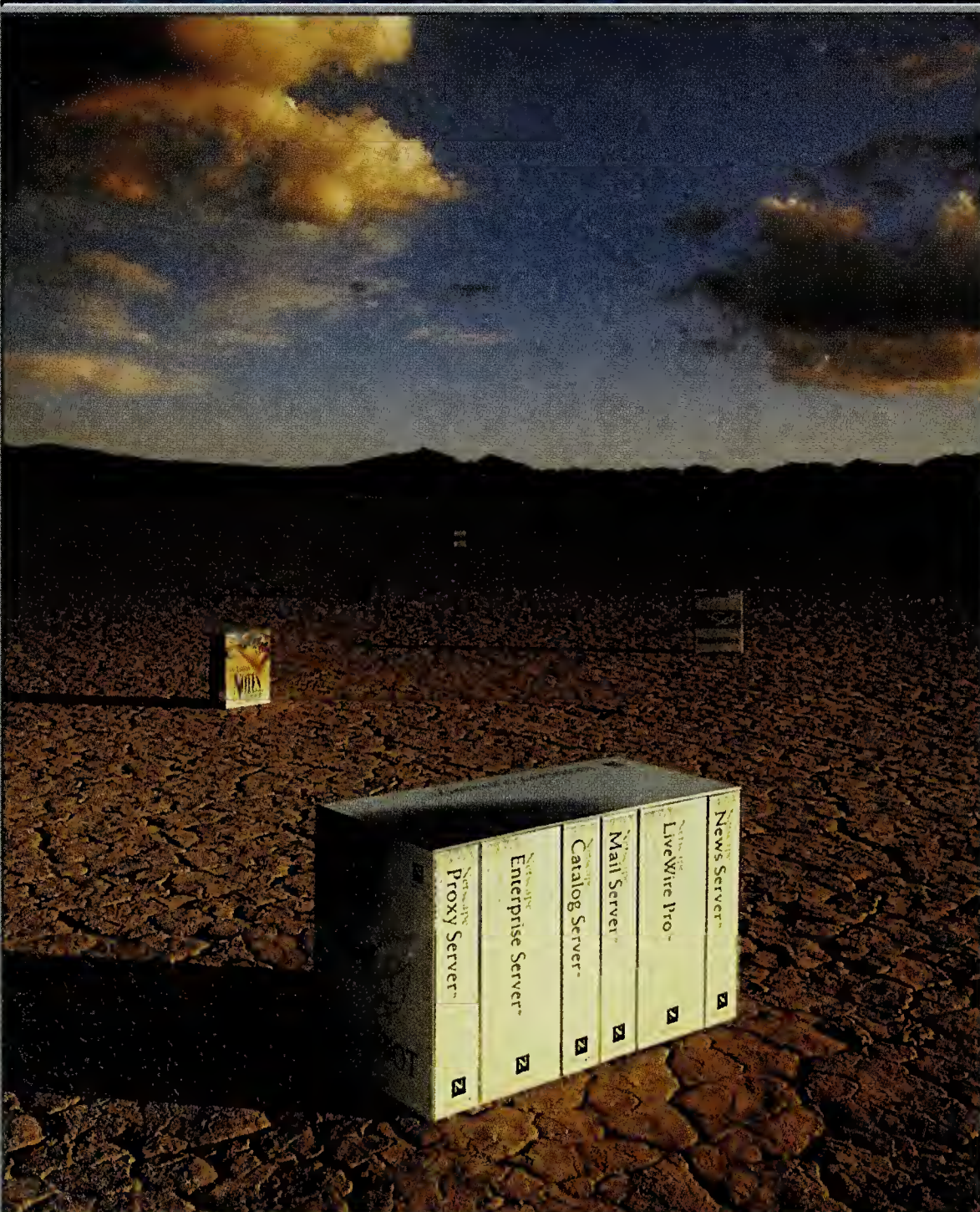
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Server-Based Java & JavaScript	Yes	No	No
Native Support For Oracle, Sybase, Informix, & ODBC	Yes	OOBC Only	OOBC Only
Cost w/1,000 Clients	\$59,300	\$183,386	\$83,383

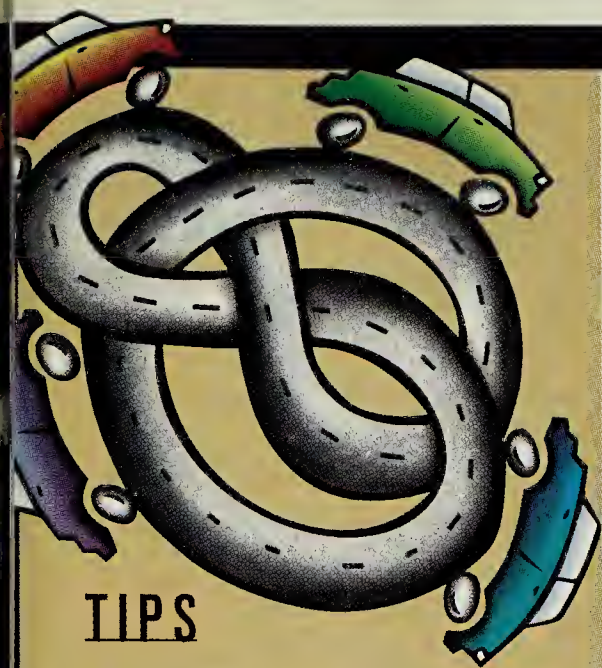
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NETSCAPE



TIPS

Traffic Patterns

How can you gauge the potential impact of webcasts on network traffic? Try examining a few key factors:

■ HOW ARE MESSAGES SENT?

Does the webcaster use a "publish and subscribe" model, where the message is broadcast only once, or does the webcast require individual transmissions to every subscriber? A single message uses less bandwidth.

■ WHAT'S BEING TRANSMITTED — an entire file or a cryptic teaser or alert? Transmitting entire files is a one-way process, whereas the alert-and-response method requires two-way transmission. The user responds to the alert to download the full file. While alerts sound like a good bandwidth preservation measure, especially if large files are involved, what happens when everybody requests a 2M-byte animated image of the new company boss all at once?

■ IF THE WEBCAST SYSTEM USES agent technology to automate updates or data retrieval, is the agent "smart" enough to distinguish trivial changes in content sources from important ones? Users want to know when the content of a Web page has changed, not the color. Like a band of Web search robots gone amok, an unending stream of nuisance alerts will not only bottleneck the pipeline but also cause "viewers" to tune out as well.

Continued from page 4

similar to many workflow systems.

What's missing is support for data encryption. McAfee, which already has its own tool, NetCrypto, will incorporate it as part of its antiviral BackWeb channel. But few if any other webcasting vendors have signed on yet for McAfee's, or anybody's, data encryption technology. Admittedly, that remains an issue for the Internet community at large, which is still refining public key/private key technology.

INFORMATION COUNTS

Beyond technological concerns, of equal importance in the webcasting equation is the information this technology was created to efficiently disseminate. "The most complex portion is managing content," Houston Industries' Bertrand says.

And content is valuable only to the extent that it is used. Like TV and radio, Web broadcasts may go out, but that doesn't mean people are tuning in. A stale site, like a languishing Web page, can be worse than no site at all. "As soon as people see out-of-date material, they'll lose interest [in the channel]," says Jeff Weiss, director of engineering for Internet and new media at Electronic Data Systems Corp. in Plano, Texas.

At Houston Industries, experts in each department or area work to keep content fresh, reviewing items such as which operational data or employee policy manual revisions should go out over the intranet channels. Bertrand concedes this might be a good role for the corporate librarian. "I've got a call in to her right now," he notes.

In fact, the differences in information flow driven by webcasting could exact the same types of business process changes that organizations encountered with integrated client/server enterprise resource planning applications. "What you're doing is changing the way that an organization distributes information," CBOT's Stewart says. Cultural issues,

WEBCASTING

not technology, will be the key hurdle to implementing webcasting within his organization, he notes.

But some tools could help webcasting realize its potential as an agent of change — literally. Several include or connect to agent technologies that scan Web sites for changes or track end-user preferences. Niche vendors such as Imana, Inc., a Bay Area start-up, are developing their own agents that webcast providers could use. They could work either in top-down fashion, determining which information to broadcast to which groups of people, or from the bottom up, sifting through incoming channels to determine which ones would be useful for a particular end user.

And, adds Mitch Hadley, strategic technology vice president at NationsBank, that's where the true value of webcasting may lie. Imagine the business benefits that stem from knowing exactly which features of which products your customers want to know about or which bits of information your staff or business partners need to perform their jobs.

"I don't think we understand where the starting value of this technology is yet," he says. "Maybe the strategic part is the agent and the push part is just the presentation mechanism."

Baer is a freelance writer in Bedford, Mass.

RESOURCES RESOURCES

ARTICLES ON PUSH TECHNOLOGY AND WEBCASTING:

- **BusinessWeek**, Feb. 24, 1997, "A Way Out Of The Web Maze: It's called webcasting, and it promises to deliver the info you want, straight to your PC" (www.businessweek.com/1997/08/b35151.htm)
- **Network World's IntraNet** supplement, January 1997: "Pushing Back: Broadcast technology streamlines intranet traffic"

PROJECT: NATIONSBANK

NationsBank To Scale Up Push Pilot

By Steve Alexander

NationsBank in Charlotte, N.C., has begun a pilot project that uses push technology over an intranet to provide corporate messaging, news and stock prices. Initially available to about 50 employees, it will be tested during the next three months with up to 300 people. If the pilot is successful, the technology will be rolled out to the 23,000 of the bank's 80,000 employees who have desktop TCP/IP connections. Under the push technology plan, the information systems group will be responsible for the intranet's content as well as its technology. Mitch Hadley, a vice president in the strategic technology group, discussed the project.

WHAT THEY'RE DOING

NationsBank is using Wayfarer Communications, Inc.'s Incisa in the pilot; it will decide in 90 days whether to roll it out to the 23,000 employees. It has selected three intranet channels for the pilot (others are available): Reuters for news, PC Quotes for stock information and a corporate- or department-level communications channel. Users can subscribe to the channels they want or turn them off. Management lets employees make their own choices.

WHY THEY'RE DOING IT

Top management wanted to be able to push key internal news out to employees. Before, this was done manually by sending faxes to everyone, sending messages through the various (incompatible) E-mail systems and posting information on nonelectronic bulletin boards. These procedures have been augment-

ed but not replaced by push technology.

HOW THEY'RE DOING IT

NationsBank has a dedicated NT server on which the Wayfarer server software resides. Users have Windows-based PCs and download the Wayfarer client via the intranet. The client software contains four Shockwave movies that add graphics animation. When a message arrives, text rolls across a 3-sq-in. window, along with instructions to click for more information. Users can minimize the application so it comes to the foreground only if someone sends an alert message.

On the server side, an administrator creates sets and subsets of users. The application doesn't require a database yet because the Reuters and PC Quotes information arrives in streams that aren't saved. Corporate messages also aren't saved during the pilot.

WHAT ABOUT BANDWIDTH?

When the pilot has 100 to 200 users, messages will be sent to about 50 people at a time to see what the impact is. If Wayfarer causes network problems, it will be turned off. IS would then have to make a business case for expanding the network to handle it.

COST AND ROI

The project has not been cost-

justified yet. Server licenses will cost \$5,000 per 100 users; the cost of the news services is unclear. Wayfarer hasn't charged anything for the pilot so far.

EASE OF IMPLEMENTATION

This is just NT server management.

HOW THEY WILL MEASURE SUCCESS

By people asking for and accepting the service. Monitoring server traffic to determine usage, while possible, isn't part of the pilot. Eventually, departments will be asked whether they are willing to pay for the service.

ADVICE

The challenge is to offer content of high enough quality that people will choose to leave the application running on their desktops all the time. "If we announce to everyone that there is a muffin sale tomorrow, they'll turn the thing off. So we need a policy in place about what to send to the group that includes everyone," Hadley says.

There's not a clear winner in this type of product right now, and the technology is changing rapidly. Whatever technology the bank chooses to use in the next six months will probably not be the technology it will be using a year from now.

Alexander is a freelance writer in Edina, Minn.

NATIONSBANK'S

MITCH HADLEY: 'If

we announce to everyone that there is a muffin sale tomorrow, they'll turn the thing off'

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SuiteSpot is just one example of how Netscape is providing open Internet technology to better link people and information. To see how we can help your

company improve its internal communications, call us toll free at 1-800-397-8607. Or visit our Internet Web site at <http://info.netscape.com/pre4>



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Livelink Intranet is a complete off-the-shelf application that you install and start using right away – all your people need is a Web browser. It

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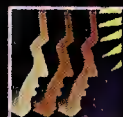
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